

# The Unconditional Promise

Genesis 15:5-18

A small boy riding a bus home from Sunday school was very proud of the card he had received, which had a picture and a caption that read: "Have Faith in God." Then to his dismay the card slipped from his hand and fluttered out the window. "Stop the bus!" he cried. "I've lost my 'faith in God!'"

The driver pulled the bus to a stop, and as the young lad climbed out and went to retrieve his card, one of the adult riders smiled and made a comment about the innocence of youth. Another more perceptive adult observed, "All of us would be better off if we were that concerned about our faith."

Everyone has faith in something. Even a lack of faith is a kind of faith. Dr. Stuart Briscoe writes, "The object of faith is what really matters, more than anything else. Some people who had strong faith in thin ice never lived to tell the tale but died by faith. Others who had weak faith in thick ice were as safe as if they stood on concrete. The object of faith is what really matters, more than anything else."

Who is the object of our faith? It is God. The God who created the heavens and the earth. You see, it is important that we understand in whom we believe, in whom we place our trust. Blind faith can get us killed. Thin ice is thin ice. Trusting in thin ice is never a good idea. Trusting in God is always a good idea.

Today's scripture takes place after Abram had won a great victory. He defeated Chedorlaomer [KEEDER-lay-omier] and the kings that were with him, and likely was fearful that these kings would later come back and take revenge on him. After these things occurred the Word of the Lord came to Abram to give him encouragement. Although Abram had restored the goods taken in the battle to the owners, he was still uncertain as to what would happen in the future. Chapter 15 opens by saying, "After this, the Word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision." This was a divine communication with Abram. It came in a vision and the Lord walked with him through three steps of faith. Follow along as we read and observe ...

The Promise (v. 5)

The Faith (v. 6), and...

The Covenant (vv. 7-18)

## I. Body

### A. The Promise (v. 5)

#### a) **Realizing God's promises will expand your horizons**

##### 1. Out of his tent

a) It seems almost as if Abram was sulking inside his tent

b) At a minimum, the tent was blocking his vision of what God had in store for him.

##### 2. Change of focus

a) Come out of there

b) Look up

c) Quote... "A faithful life - leaning into the vision of God for this world - often extends to a horizon far beyond our lives."

##### 3. A New perspective

a) Count your "blessings," Abram

b) As numerous as the stars.

##### 4. Illustration

a) "Emerson said that if the stars came out only once a year, everyone would stay up all night to behold them. We have seen the stars so often that we don't bother to look at them anymore. Have you grown accustomed to God's Promises?"

B. The Faith (v. 6)

a) **The only component required from you is belief**

1. Founded upon the Lord

a) "... he believed the Lord..."

b) This same Lord

(1) created all that is

(2) sustains all that lives

2. Belief is all that He asks from us.

a) It is required

b) Hebrews 11:6 -- And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

3. Abram might have said, "God I don't have a clue about all of this, but I will trust you to figure it all out."

a) Illustration: A man goes to the doctor and tells him that he hasn't been feeling well.

b) The doctor examines him, leaves the room and comes back with three different bottles of pills.

c) The doctor says, "Take the green pill with a big glass of water when you get up. Take the blue pill with a big glass of water after lunch. Then just before going to bed, take the red pill with another big glass of water."

d) Startled to be put on so much medicine, the man says, "Wow doc. Exactly what's my problem?"

e) The doctor says, "You're not drinking enough water."

f) Romans 4:18 says, "against all hope, Abram in hope believed..." He didn't have it all figured out.

g) Remember what Stuart Briscoe said, "The **object of faith** is what really matters, more than anything else."

4. So. What does that mean for any of us? Rom. 4:23-25 -- Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

— —> Do You Believe?

### C. The Covenant (vv. 7-18)

#### a) **Look at Who does all of the work**

1. The sacrifice was prepared
2. This is what happened when a covenant was made. Both the process and the meaning were equally powerful. First the parties would take some animals and kill them, slice them in half. Then they would each state the responsibilities and rights of the covenant, and then hand in hand, they would both walk together through the midst of the animals.
  - a) It was an incredibly sacred moment for all involved, and that was for two very good reasons.
  - b) First: Walking together through the bodies of the animals communicated a bond saying, we are closer now than the left and the right part of the animal. It was a FAMILY relationship being established. The idea being, "if you can't trust family, who can you trust."
  - c) Second: Walking together through the blood of the animals was a way of communicating the severity of the promises made. The idea being, "If I fail to live up to my end of the bargain, may I be torn in two even as this animal was torn in two.
  - d) Making a covenant in this matter was not done lightly, because it was considered rock solid. This is way beyond "Pinkie Swears" or "Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye." When a covenant was made in this manner it was **as solid a guarantee** as a guarantee can get.
3. The Covenant sworn
  - a) A furnace - representing affliction and judgment.
  - b) A lamp - the salvation of God
  - c) All of this imagery is pointing to Jesus. Jesus is called the light of the world in the gospel of John, and to Jesus all the right to Judgment has been given.

4. God, Himself, passes through

a) When God makes a covenant there are no requirements from mankind

b) Hebrews 6:13-15 -- For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you." And so, after [Abraham] had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

c) The oaths of the covenant were not between God and Abraham, but between God and Himself with Abraham as the beneficiary. In Genesis 15:12, Abraham was not allowed to pass through the pieces, but instead a deep sleep fell upon Abraham and God passed between the pieces.

(1) This is an important point. If the covenant was sealed between man and God, then the covenant would have been broken when man failed. God's people would have been required to pay the penalty of the oath and the oath would have passed away without the promise.

(2) But because the oath was between God and Himself, the people did not have the power to break the oath. They could only **EITHER** walk within the boundaries of that covenant or walk away from that covenant.

(3) Each time the people sinned and turned away from God, the covenant remained. God was not bound by the people's choice to obey or not to obey.

## II. Conclusion

- A. So now we come to the question, how does all of this apply to you?
- B. Through Christ, God has made these promises to you (Romans 4:16ff), indeed he has even promised you a share in the "promised land" of eternity. Heaven lays before you. But let's face it, far too often heaven seems a long way off. And if we were honest with each other when the questions were asked, We'd hear more struggles than victories in many a dear saints life.
- C. Sometimes, we begin to wonder, even though we've been saved by faith, we begin to wonder. Is God's gift really for me? Maybe I'm just deceived, maybe I've misunderstood something. Maybe after all, God's salvation works for those people, (Whoever they may be) but God's salvation doesn't work for me.
- D. And sometimes in our struggle to believe we look up to God in whatever weakened prayer we can offer and we say to him, "But God, you've promised these things, how will I know that they will happen just as you say?"
- E. That's when God tells you to look to the cross. At the cross; Jesus' body was torn. The spikes, the Spear the crown and the whip, all of them broke the body of Christ. Isaiah tells us the punishment was so severe that Jesus was barely recognizable as a man at all.
- F. As the blood ran down the cross and dripped on the ground. The Smoldering fire pot of God's justice met side by side with the flaming torch of his holiness and righteousness, and together God's justice and Righteousness passed through Jesus.
- G. Where were you? You were in the same place Abram was. He was off to the side, watching the event. He didn't walk through the sacrifice, because the covenant didn't depend on him. God wasn't making an "I will do this if you'll do that" type covenant.
- H. Listen to how the Apostle Paul described God's promise to Abraham in Romans Chapter 4. (From The Message)
  - 1. That famous promise God gave Abraham—was not given because of something Abraham did or would do...If those who get what God gives, only get it by doing everything they are told to do, and filling out all the right forms, properly signed ... that's not a holy promise; that's a business deal --- a contract drawn up by a hard-nosed lawyer and with plenty of fine print... But (with God) there is no contract in the first place, simply a promise—and God's promise at that. ... You can't break it. ... Romans 4:13-15 THE MESSAGE
- I. Review
  - 1. Realizing God's promises will expand your horizons
  - 2. The one thing required from you is faith
  - 3. God does all of the work of covenant-keeping.